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EAID

SUBJECT: TFHA01: EMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE EARTHQUAKE SITREP as of 1800,
Day 13

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Earthquake damage in a rural agricultural area near Port-au-Prince was relatively light, but communities are being challenged by incoming migrants from the capital city and the lack of cash to purchase its agricultural produce. The rural regional hospital is receiving patients from the hospital ship Comfort, to clear beds for more critically-injured victims onboard. In Port-au-Prince, gasoline and fresh produce are readily available at pre-quake prices, but few residents have the cash to buy them. Banks and wire transfer companies are open, but cash is not flowing fast enough to support the local economy. The Parliament struggles vainly to become relevant in the crisis. Business leaders present ideas to accelerate recovery. Port damage is worse than originally thought. The airport plans to commence limited commercial operations on February 15. End summary.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFTERSHOCKS OUTSIDE OF PORT-AU-PRINCE

¶2. (SBU) Poloff visited several rural mountain communities approximately eight miles southwest of Port-au-Prince to assess damage and economic conditions. In the six districts that include Kenscoff and its environs, damage and injuries were light. According to the Director General (DG) of the Kenscoff mayor's office, there were:

- * 1,646 homes destroyed;
- * 2,403 damaged homes;
- * 13,662 people without shelter;
- * 127 people injured; and
- * 61 deaths.

The DG also said that there were approximately 6,000 migrants who have evacuated Port-au-Prince and moved into the area, most living with family members and only a few camping in public areas.

¶3. (SBU) Little damage could be seen in Kenscoff and its surrounding villages, with only a few damaged buildings and walls. The DG said that the majority of damage, injuries and deaths occurred among the many isolated farms in the region. The region's economy is based on agriculture.

¶4. (SBU) Living conditions in the Kenscoff area appeared to be unaffected by the quake. The public water system (supplied by springs) is meeting all water needs, the markets were filled with fresh produce and staples, and vehicle traffic was at a normal level. However, the DG said that fruit and vegetable producers in the region are suffering from low sales in their primary market of Port-au-Prince, where few residents have cash to purchase their goods.

¶5. (SBU) A few miles from Kenscoff, the Baptist Mission Hospital was treating approximately 400 patients injured in the earthquake. Many of those were from Port-au-Prince, who were transported via helicopter from the USNS Hospital Ship Comfort to vacate beds needed for more seriously injured victims. The victims sent to the Baptist Mission from the Comfort consisted primarily of broken legs. Doctors at the hospital said they were running short of critical supplies.

SITUATION IN PORT-AU-PRINCE

¶6. (SBU) Poloff visited several sites in Port-au-Prince:

* Most gas stations were open, with no lines. The price of gasoline was USD 4.35 per gallon - the same as pre-quake prices. The reason there were no lines, according to Poloff's discussions with station attendants, was that few people have the cash to buy gas.

* Street side markets, where most residents purchase fresh produce, are open in abundance, with large quantities and a wide assortment of fruits and vegetables. Almost all of the produce came from the Kenscoff area. Imported items like rice, beans and even cheese, came from pre-quake stocks. Prices were at or only slightly elevated above normal, owing to the large quantities of goods and few purchasers. Vendors complained that sales were low because few people have cash.

* Some banks and most wire transfer companies were open, with long but orderly lines. However, it is clear that access to cash is the bottleneck that is choking the local economy.

* PNH officers were stationed on several major intersections, where none were observed only two days ago. Nevertheless, PNH presence is still far below its pre-quake level.

PARLIAMENT SEEKING RELEVANCE

¶7. (SBU) On January 25, the Lower Chamber passed a resolution (non-binding) outlining broad principles for the relief and reconstruction efforts. The resolution had no legal effect and received little coverage in the press. The Lower Chamber also formed two special committees, one on aid management and the other on planning Haiti's reconstruction.

¶8. (SBU) Meanwhile, Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive and other Ministers did not appear at a Senate hearing to which they were invited, citing other priorities on their agendas. Senator Michel Clerie is now Senate President ad interim, in the absence of Kely Bastien, recovering in the United States from injuries sustained in the quake.

¶9. (SBU) Parliament is attempting to re-establish itself and has asked for help from the Executive in getting access to internet and radio. However, it continues to be sidelined by the Executive, the media and other actors involved in relief efforts.

PRIVATE SECTOR PRESENTS IDEAS FOR MOVING FORWARD

¶10. (SBU) Members of the Haiti's Economic Forum, comprised of business leaders, met with EmbOffs on January 26 to discuss how the private sector can move forward. Reginald Boulos, President of the Forum, declared, "The most important step is bridging the recovery," referring to interim actions that can be taken by the private sector to bolster the economy on the road to recovery. Boulos stated that the immediate goal is to speed up the re-opening of businesses in five key areas: banks, gas stations, supermarkets, telecommunications and garment production. The private sector is also working with the Minister of Finance and the Government of the Dominican Republic to establish procedures to facilitate customs processing.

¶11. (SBU) Lionel Delatour recommended the construction of new industrial parks beyond Port-au-Prince. In particular, he noted the importance of focusing on industries other than the garment sector, which only employs approximately 20% of employees in the formal sector.

SEAPORTS AND AIRPORTS

¶12. (SBU) The sole working pier at the principal port is no longer operating and will be out of commission for an unknown period. Divers inspecting the previously damaged pier noticed new damage that will stop all traffic until it is repaired. However, the US Navy has already brought in equipment to handle barges and will use smaller vessels to load and unload ships, avoiding the pier. Alternate sites are available in nearby locations outside of the port, but the throughput is unknown on those wharfs. The military should still be able to handle the arriving rations for the "food surge", but non-priority traffic may have to wait in harbor for longer periods.

¶13. (SBU) The head of the Civil Aviation Authority told military officials today that American Airlines will begin flying into the airport on February 15. To do this, the airport plans to spend USD 400K to repair the west end of the terminal, a project estimated by Haitian engineers to require USD 650K. He asked if the USG would fund the difference. He also said that no other airlines would be able to use the airport, reasoning that since American normally serves 70% of the passengers, it should be allowed to operate first in the small part of the terminal that is reparable. He also said that he was going to restrict UN access to the commercial tarmac.

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